



## No Child Left Behind Graduation Rate

The federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) requires states to consider graduation rate when making Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) determinations for school districts and high schools. The legislation gives states a great deal of latitude to set graduation rate benchmarks, but does provide several specific requirements for how graduation rates must be calculated.

### Benchmarks

In Tennessee, the graduation rate benchmark requires school districts and high schools as a whole to reach a **90% graduation rate** or show **improvement** from the previous year. To show sufficient improvement, districts and schools must be on track to meet the 90% graduation rate benchmark by 2013-14.

Other states have enacted a wide variety of graduation rate benchmarks:

State	Graduation Rate Benchmark
Florida	1 percent improvement
Georgia	60% or improvement
North Carolina	90% or 0.1% improvement
South Carolina	Improvement
Texas	70% or improvement
Virginia	57% or improvement

### Calculations

The NCLB legislation and accompanying guidance requires that states calculate graduation rates using only high school students who graduate with regular diplomas. Therefore, students who receive GED certificates, certificates of attendance, and special education diplomas cannot be counted as graduates within graduation rate calculations. Furthermore, it requires that states only consider those students who receive regular diplomas on

time. In Tennessee, special education and English Language Learner (ELL) students have 5 years and one summer to graduate on time, and all other students have 4 years and one summer.

Approximately 20 states, including Tennessee, use a methodology to calculate graduation rates developed by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), U.S. Department of Education. It seeks to estimate the percent of students who complete high school with a diploma. Tennessee modifies the definition to comply with the NCLB requirements discussed above, and the resulting formula estimates the percent of students who complete high school on time with a regular diploma:

#### Regular On-Time Graduates

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Regular On-Time Graduates + Other Graduates + Dropouts

- *Regular on-time graduates* are students who receive a regular high school diploma within four years and one summer and special education students or English Language Learner (ELL) students who receive regular diplomas within five years and one summer.
- *Other graduates* includes students receiving certificates of attendance, special education diplomas, and GED certificates.
- *Dropouts* includes students from the 2003-04 graduating class who dropped out of school in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade (2000-01), 10<sup>th</sup> grade (2001-02), 11<sup>th</sup> grade (2002-03), and 12<sup>th</sup> grade (2003-04).

States that do not use the NCES estimation methodology take several different approaches to calculating graduation rates. Some states with statewide student-level tracking systems can calculate graduation rates by observing individual students over time beginning with their ninth grade year. Other states with insufficient data must use dropout rates or other statistics as a proxy for graduation rate.